



NEWS

The Graduate School and University Center/The City University of New York
33 West 42 Street/New York, N.Y./212-790-4331

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THE CRYSTAL PALACE ON 42nd STREET: GRADUATE CENTER MALL EXHIBIT

LOOKS BACK TO 1850's NEW YORK LANDMARK

The Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, popularly known as the New York Crystal Palace and located on the site of Bryant Park in the 1850's, was in reality America's first world's fair. Designed to bring the marvels of technology and art to the masses, this unusual Exhibition Hall showed reapers, revolvers and sewing machines, along with painting and sculpture.

Now an all but forgotten landmark in New York City's history, the New York Crystal Palace will be brought back to life this October. Visually, that is, in an exhibition to be held in the Mall of the Graduate Center of the City University at 33 West 42 Street, just across the street from where the Crystal Palace stood over 100 years ago in what was then called Reservoir Square.

The exhibition, entitled "The Crystal Palace on 42nd Street, 1853-54: A Graphic Representation," will run from October 7-26 and will be open to the public Mondays through Fridays, 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays, from 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

The Graduate Center Mall show will include mural size enlargements of drawings and prints of both the exterior and interior of the building as well as many of the industrial and art exhibits.

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Ms. Linda Hyman, the coordinator of the Mall show and author of the catalog, describes the New York Crystal Palace as "a curious mixture of high ideals and more worldly motivations. Half success, half failure, a combination of hard-driven deals and high-toned moralizing, the New York exhibition was -- perhaps more than any other single event -- symbolic of antebellum culture and society," continues Ms. Hyman, a former special assistant to the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and now a Ph.D. student at the CUNY Graduate Center specializing in American cultural history.

"Modelled after the famous London Crystal Palace of 1851, the exhibition," Ms. Hyman points out, was intended to "turn the interests of the people away from their vulgar activities and elevate them into well-behaved, high-minded, hard-working citizens." Unfortunately, the endeavor turned out to be both a financial disaster for its backers as well as a social flop. The press of the day was particularly harsh, and criticism of the manner in which real estate around the Palace was developing filled the newspapers. The character of 42nd Street, then the northernmost bounds of the populated part of New York City, changed dramatically. On the empty lots surrounding the Crystal Palace, there quickly appeared side-shows, gambling dens and "other haunts of dissipation." The masses, it seemed, were more interested in this than in the artistic and technological marvels on display in the Crystal Palace.

In 1854 there was an attempt to revitalize the Crystal Palace with a new management headed by P. T. Barnum, but even this master showman could not save the New York Crystal Palace. Officially closing its doors on November 1, 1854, the building during the next three years was leased to various organizations for festivities and fairs. Its fate was finally determined in 1858 when it caught fire and burned to the ground in less than half an hour.

The Graduate Center Mall show presents an important social commentary on New York City of the 1850's. Ms. Hyman feels looking backward from today's vantage point, we are perhaps more inclined to find positive value in the Crystal Palace than did New Yorkers of that time:

"The building itself, though no longer standing, remains one of America's first and most interesting examples of iron and glass architecture," she said. "And the exhibits of industrial and artistic objects, whether huge agricultural machines or ornately decorated Victorian furniture, attest to the high degree of invention and skill that characterized the artistic expressions of antebellum culture. Perhaps most interesting is the very grouping together of such objects of art and industry -- a stern reminder that there was once a time when high standards of taste and style were applied to all things designed or built, no matter what their use."

In addition to the Mall exhibit, on October 25, the CUNY Graduate Center, in cooperation with the Victorian Society in America, will hold an all-day symposium on the Crystal Palace. Among the participants will be Henry Russell Hitchcock, of New York University, Albert Fein, of Long Island University, Robert Post, of the Smithsonian Institution, and Milton Brown, William Gerdts, and Jacob Landy of City University. A full program is attached.

The Mall exhibit is open to the public free of charge. The catalog for the Mall show will be on sale for \$1.50 during the hours of exhibition.

Admission to the symposium is by invitation. Members of the press may attend by calling Mrs. Nanette Shaw at the Graduate Center, 212 790-4331.

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First Annual Symposium in New York Cultural Studies

THE EXHIBITION OF THE INDUSTRY OF ALL NATIONS 1853-54

Friday, October 25, 1974

Auditorium
Graduate Center/CUNY
33 West 42 Street, New York City

Afternoon Session 1:00 p.m.

Chairman: Henry Russell Hitchcock, Professor of Art History,
New York University

Albert Fein, Director of Regional and Urban Studies, Long Island University,
Brooklyn Center
"The London Crystal Palace of 1851"

Linda Hyman, Doctoral Student in History, CUNY
"The New York Crystal Palace: A Social History"

Jacob Landy, Professor of Art, City College, CUNY
"The Crystal Palace Architecture"

Robert Post, National Museum of History and Technology,
Smithsonian Institution
"Science and Technology at the New York Crystal Palace"

Evening Session 7:30 p.m.

Chairman: Milton W. Brown, Executive Officer, Doctoral Program in Art
History, CUNY

Doreen Bolger, Doctoral Student in Art History, CUNY
"Art in New York at the time of the Crystal Palace"

William Gerdts, Professor of Art History, Brooklyn College, CUNY
"Art at the Crystal Palace"

Cocktails will be served from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the Mall.

